

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Fiscal Year 2007

During the fiscal year 2007, the Human Services Funding Committee transitioned to become the Community Development Committee. The 5-member Human Services Funding Committee responsibilities expanded beyond reviewing funding requests from human services agencies, and recommendations to the Select Board, Finance Committee and Town Manager. Now, the Community Development Committee's membership must consist of seven voting members and one non-voting staff liaison, the Community Service Director. Out of the 7 voting members, one member represents the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee, one member must represent the Public Transportation Committee, and at least two Committee members must be low- or moderate-income as defined by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The Community Development Committee follows the Select Board guidelines for the procedures and recommendations for human service funding, as well as holding the required public hearings and periodic evaluation of the social services provided, as the Human Services Funding Committee has in the past. The Community Development Committee's new charge now incorporates recommendations to the Select Board regarding the Town's Community Development Block Grant program (CDBG), including both the social service and non-social service community development activities. This new assignment will require gathering input from Amherst residents and from other boards, committees and Town departments about CDBG projects. The Committee will review and evaluate funding requests from boards and committees, local social service agencies, citizens and others interested in receiving CDBG funding from the Town. The committee will schedule and hold the required CDBG public hearings, and make recommendations to the Select Board regarding CDBG projects to be included in the grant applications. The Committee will update Town Meeting yearly, as well as monitor the progress of the CDBG project implementation.

Between July 1, 2006 and July 1, 2007 the Committee met 15 times. Members were Ruth Backes (resigned), Claude Tellier, Calvin Brower, Ruth Wade (resigned and replaced by Jana McClure), Tamara Rutland Mills, and Co-Chairs Mary Jane Laus and Paulette Brooks.

### HUMAN SERVICES:

#### Evaluations and Impact

The Committee began the fiscal year by following up on the June 23, 2006 letter to all human services funding recipients requesting two "measurable impacts or benefits" to the Amherst participants they service. The Community Development Committee sought to measure benefit, other than numbers of Amherst participants, to justify continued funding. The Committee planned to meet individually with each agency to collect meaningful data about the individual programs they provided. Committee members each volunteered to meet with at least two agencies to identify their long-term goals and help them develop a more formalized evaluation plan. As Committee members reported on their findings, it became clear that the agencies' services to the community were too widely diverse to measure comparatively.

#### Amherst Survival Center

Beginning in July 2006, the Community Development Committee was informed of the Amherst Human Rights office's investigation into participant complaints against the Amherst Survival Center. As one of the human service agencies funded by the Town of Amherst, and because the Committee's

charge included “reviewing and recommending funding,” the Community Development Committee became a forum for the controversy. The Committee evaluated the limitations to make recommendations within its charge. During meetings held with the Town Manager, the Committee recommended that a Town representative serve on the Amherst Survival Center Board of Director as a non-voting liaison, as well as contract changes to incorporate greater accountability in future contracts for funding.

#### Human Services:

The Community Development Committee reviewed proposals for funding from human service agencies and made funding recommendations to the Select Board, Finance Committee and Town Meeting. The Town Manager’s and Finance Committee’s budget proposed \$25,000 for human services funding, cutting funding from its prior budget of \$140,977. On April 3, 2007, after meeting with a member of the Finance Committee who stressed the present budget crisis, the Committee could not recommend anything lower than 50% support, or \$45,250, of the prior year’s funding from the Town as critically necessary.

The Select Board’s original recommendation for human service funding was \$56,000. The Committee’s majority vote recommended a request to Town Meeting for \$114,450 for human service funding. Town Meeting member Isaac BenEzra challenged the Committee to ask for 1% increase from last year’s funding. The Committee’s minority voted to support BenEzra’s recommendation. Town Meeting appropriated \$66,000 for FY 08 social service agencies (see Community Services Department report for details of the Committee’s funding recommendations).

#### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT

During October 2006, the Committee learned that Amherst is no longer considered a mini-entitlement community. The Mini-Entitlement Program provides funding for eligible Massachusetts towns with Community Development Block Grant funds on a non-competitive basis. The new determination by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts means that Amherst will no longer be automatically eligible to receive the funding from the State. The Town may apply for these funds, but the eligibility criteria make funding more difficult to secure. A public hearing was held on January 4, 2007.

The Community Development Committee recommended that the 2007 CDBG application include the following activities:

1. ADA compliance for sidewalks and traffic lights in one or more geographic areas (the East Amherst Village Center and Amherst Center)
2. some ADA modifications at the Bangs Community Center
3. continuation of the Town’s childcare tuition assistance program
4. general administration and expenses.

On February 1, 2007, the Community Development Committee and the Housing Partnership held a joint public meeting to gather input from the community.

Respectfully submitted,  
Paulette Brooks, Co-Chair